



**Minutes**  
**King County Rural Forest Commission**  
**May 10, 2006**  
**Preston Community Center**

*Commissioners present:* Alex Kamola (Chair), Julie Stangell (Vice Chair), Jim Franzel, Dennis Dart and Doug McClelland

*Commissioners absent:* Jean Bouffard, Doug Schindler; Leonard Guss, Ole Una and Lee Witter Kahn

*Exofficio member present:* Marilyn Cope, Amy Grotta and Randy Sandin

*Staff:* Kathy Creahan, Forestry and Agriculture Lead; Kristi McClelland, Forestry; Bill Loeber, Forestry; Bill Eckel, Office of Rural and Resource Programs Section Manager; and Julia Larson, Rural Economic Strategies Program Manager.

*Guests:* Boyd Norton, Washington Department of Natural Resources Small Forest Landowner Office and Matt Rourke, forester with International Forestry Consultants

Alex Kamola called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

**Meeting Summary**

*Action Items:*

1. Amy will report to the RFC on the WSU small forest landowner survey when it is released.
2. Jim and Kathy will draft a letter to the County Executive and the Council encouraging them to support reauthorization and full funding of the Secure Rural Schools Act. Linda will email the draft to the RFC members for review and comment.
3. Julie will incorporate comments and email another draft "Q&A: Certification of Forest Lands Owned by King County" to the group.
4. Kathy will follow up with the Executive's office on identifying mechanisms for communications with the RFC.
5. Linda and Alex will move forward on elements of the Council Communications Plan.

**Motions:**

Motion 1-05-06 That "the minutes of the March 8, 2006 meeting be approved." It was moved, seconded and unanimously approved.

Motion 2-05-06 That "the RFC adopt the plan outlined on the sheet with changes as discussed, including talking to the Executive." It was moved, seconded and approved.

### **Staff Reports**

Kathy Creahan, Forestry and Agriculture Programs Lead

*Forest Management Infrastructure.* At the last Rural Forest Commission (RFC) meeting, commissioners identified a number of difficulties that small forest landowners face in implementing Forest Stewardship Plans. Kathy reported that in response, the Forestry Program and WSU Extension staff developed a plan for addressing the issues raised ("Report to the Rural Forest Commission on Forest Management Infrastructure"). Kathy asked for feedback on the plan. The essential elements of the plan are: a workshop for forestry consultants and operators regarding county code and Forest Stewardship Plans; training for forest landowners in working with consultants to conduct a harvest; promoting communication among forest landowners by means of electronic media; community fire planning to promote cooperative forestry; and grant programs for youth in forestry and support for forestry infrastructure, respectively.

Alex suggested that the staff talk with Green River Community College regarding partnership potential and research what the landowners need and expect with regard to forestry consultants. Amy said that WSU will soon release a statewide survey of small forest landowners that indicates a high rate of implementation of forest practices among small forest landowners who have taken WSU forest stewardship classes. Julie said that one of the hurdles is that most small forest lands have few marketable logs and that the costs for a forestry consultant to provide the level of service needed by most small forest landowners is high. Alex agreed and said that is why the economy of scale that comes in when landowners work cooperatively is important. Dennis said that by getting a group together for a cooperative harvest, the logger's fixed costs can be spread out among several landowners in the same general area. He added that cooperative harvests also keep permit costs down because permits can go as a batch to the Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES). Dennis continued that a single enthusiastic landowner can bring others on board and that real estate agents can be a conduit for bringing in new landowners to a cooperative venture. Julie suggested a self-guided tour that could help people see that a harvested land looks different over time.

Action. Amy will report to the RFC on the survey when it is released.

*Forestry Program 2007 Budget.* Kathy reported that the 2007 budget request includes funding for all current Forestry Program and WSU Extension forestry positions. Kathy has requested one additional forestry staff position to better implement the RFC's recommendations related to improved permitting processes and landowner technical assistance.

### **Update on Reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, PL106-393**

Jim Franzel, RFC and Kathy Creahan, Forestry and Agriculture Programs Lead

Jim explained that prior to enactment of the Secure Rural Schools legislation in 2000, 25 percent of the timber harvest receipts from harvest on federal lands were shared with the counties where the harvest occurred. Historically, National Forest System lands in King County returned over

\$2 million annually to the county, in part to fund schools and roads and in part to compensate the county for the fact that the federal government does not pay taxes. Jim said that in the 1990s, timber harvest receipts on federal land in the Northwest declined dramatically. Recognizing that revenue from forest products had been sharply curtailed, six years ago the President signed Public Law 106-393, known as the “Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000” or “Payments to Counties” to reinstate payments to counties with federal forest land. The law will sunset in September of this year and the payments will cease unless the act is reauthorized by Congress.

According to Jim, the Title I of the law stipulates that eighty to eighty-five percent of the funds be allocated to projects that support rural schools and roads. In King County this is about \$2 million a year. Another fifteen to twenty percent of payments are allocated by counties to projects under Title II, Title III or some combination of both. Title II projects can take place either on national public lands, such as the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, or on adjacent lands where the project will benefit the public lands. These include activities such as stream and watershed improvement and forest ecosystem stewardship. Anybody can submit a grant proposal, which goes to a Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) for review. King County’s average allocation to Title II is about 2 percent or \$46,000. Kathy reported on Title III projects, which include a variety of activities that benefit public health and safety and national resources, such as search and rescue on federal land, youth forestry education and community fire planning.

Jim said that Congress is trying to find a source of funding for the \$400 million program, but it is difficult to find discretionary funding. At stake is about 10% of the regional Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest budget through the RAC grants and important funding for King County. Kathy said that the funding from the act is significant for the County because in addition to supporting rural roads and schools, it provides opportunities for important forest-related projects that otherwise would not be funded.

Following the presentation, RFC members discussed what action to take. Dennis said more members of the commission should be present before deciding what to do since this legislation is nationally controversial. Doug M. proposed that the RFC not address the funding mechanism, but focus on making sure that the congressional representatives know that the reauthorization is important to King County. Alex suggested that we email all RFC members to find out if the commission would like to move forward with a recommendation or wait until the next meeting. Action. Jim and Kathy will draft a letter to the County Executive and the Council encouraging them to support reauthorization and full funding of the Secure Rural Schools Act. Linda will email the draft to the RFC members, who will comment on the draft and decide via email whether or not to move forward with the letter before the July RFC meeting.

## **Forest Certification Information Sheet**

Julie Stangell, RFC Vice Chair

Julie distributed a revised draft “Q&A: Certification of Forest Lands Owned by King County” for comment by RFC members. The present draft incorporates RFC recommendations from the January 2006 meeting. Julie reminded the RFC that the purpose of the document is to provide a reference for decision-makers in King County government. The document outlines anticipated questions regarding third-party certification of forest lands such as: what is sustainable forestry, what are the County’s plans for its forest lands, and what does the RFC recommend regarding certification of County-owned forests?

The RFC members suggested a number of specific edits. Among them, Doug M. said that the estimated cost of certifying King County forests should include the cost of changing practices or a statement of what the impacts of different practices would be. Jim said the sections on the last page of the draft regarding the RFC’s recommendations should be made more specific. Alex suggested looking back to the June 2005 letter to the County Executive for the RFC’s list of six reasons why they do not recommend certification of county-owned lands at this time.

There was some discussion of the best way to present the finished document. RFC members concluded that the Q&A document might best be presented in an information packet and distributed at a briefing or brown bag lunch for those County staff who may be called upon to respond to questions about certification from the County Executive or Council.

### Action.

As a next step, Julie will incorporate today’s comments and email another draft to Alex Kamola, Doug McClelland, Amy Grotta, Ole Una and Dennis Dart, who volunteered to assist with completing the document.

## **Group Discussion to complete RFC-Council Communications Plan**

Linda Vane, RFC Staff Liaison

Linda presented a “Draft Communications Strategy” concerning outreach and ongoing communications from the RFC to the King County Council. The draft plan was generated by Doug Schindler, Lee Kahn, Amy Grotta, Doug McClelland, Marilyn Cope and Linda Vane. The plan outlines five-step approach: (1) a county Town Hall Meeting on forestry topics; (2) RFC briefing for the Council Committee as a Whole; (3) invitation to Councilmembers to RFC meetings; (4) invitation to Councilmember Lambert and RFC members to the Kahn Tree Farm tour on July 22, 2006; and (5) forestry field trip for Councilmembers in 2007.

Doug M. recommended that there also be plans to establish communications with the Executive or key staff in the Executive’s office. Marilyn suggested that the RFC invite staff from the Executive’s office to its meetings. Julie suggested that the Forestry Program develop an informational document regarding forestry issues in King County. Doug M. said it would be

useful to have a presentation on successes such as the Snoqualmie Forest and the Tolt River Highlands community fire planning effort contrasted with current challenges.

There was discussion of the best timing for a forestry Town Meeting. The consensus was that early 2007 would be best. Alex asked how much work would be involved to prepare for a Town Meeting. Kathy said that the Council staff would handle meeting logistics. Marilyn said the RFC would probably be one of several presenters giving a half-hour presentation on the issues that they consider most important.

In regard to the proposed briefing to the Committee as a Whole, Marilyn recommended that the RFC propose a briefing with the Growth Management and Natural Resources (GMNR) Committee instead. Doug said this will be important because it means a face to face meeting with Councilmembers. Kathy said we could tie the briefing to the Council's confirmation of new members of the RFC, which would give us a reason to be on the agenda. RFC members concurred.

Jim brought up the topic of an annual report, which is included in the RFC work plan. Linda will add "and annual report" to the annual briefing to the GMNR Committee as a formal mechanism for informing the Council.

Doug M. moved that "the RFC adopt the plan outlined on the sheet with changes as discussed, including talking to the Executive." The motion was seconded and carried.

#### Action

Kathy will follow up with the Executive's office on communications with the RFC. Linda and Alex will move forward on elements of the Council Communications Plan.

### **Forest Practices Permitting**

Alex Kamola, RFC Chair, facilitating

Kristi distributed a "King County Forestry Permitting Issues Update," which outlined two permit issues that the RFC and Forestry Program staff have been working on. The first issue concerned the need for a mechanism for completing forest health thinnings under a state forest practices permit, while avoiding a building moratorium. Kristi said that existing permit options are the County's Conversion Option Harvest Plan (COHP) and the state Forest Practices Permit. Neither option works well for large lot forested parcels that are characterized by overstocked stands, according to Kristi. Typically these properties are former commercial forest lands with trees that become tall and skinny and prone to breakage and disease if left alone. Currently the COHP does not allow thinning in critical areas such as steep slopes, forested wetlands or wetland buffers even if such a thinning would improve the health of the forest. At the same time, the state permit creates a disincentive to retain future building sites in forest and an incentive to clear as large a building site as King County allows (35% of the property).

Kristi explained that under the proposed change, DDES would develop language similar to state riparian thinning prescriptions, which could be guidelines applied to forest health thinning and a single permit with no moratorium. The guidelines would include prescriptions designed to prevent people from maximizing profit at the expense of forest health (e.g., by removing the best trees and leaving the weakest).

Kristi said that the second issue concerned Class IV-G Non-Conversion Permits. She explained that this permit option was created to provide a permit option that would mirror state Forest Practice Rules to parcels platted after 1960. There is concern that this new process will be prohibitively expensive. Randy provided additional background on the Class IV-G Non-Conversion Permit issues, explaining that so far DDES has had only a couple of inquiries. Randy said DDES wants help from the Forestry Program and the RFC to develop a template for this new process and have something that will work across the permitting landscape.

Randy said that he has reviewed some of the comments received on this issue and he wanted people to know that DDES is not locked into any particular process. Based on recent experience and internal review, DDES is modifying their process to accept the state Joint Aquatic Resource Protection Application (JARPA) form [see <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/ecy07015.html>] and Forest Practices Application (FPA) form [see <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/forestpractices/>] as well as the DDES application. The JARPA form is a well-developed permitting form with all the information that DDES needs. The FPA has most, but not all of what DDES needs, so DDES is developing a single page form that will provide the supplementary information required, according to Randy.

Alex asked how the review time can be reduced. Randy replied that this is where the template comes in. Some applicants want to do simple things, some complex things. The ideal situation is to come up with a template for each of the possible practices. Then it becomes a simple matter of verifying information, according to Randy.

Alex asked if this would create a situation where the thinning template is driving the prescription, rather than forest health and fire safety objectives. For example, there are cases where a clearcut and reforestation would yield better results than a thinning. Dennis said the state is wrestling with this question too. Randy replied that he is not sure if DDES can deal with all aspects of the thinning issue without considering changes to the code.

Doug M. asked how do we ensure that the small percentage of population who will use this as a window do not take advantage of this and ruin things for those who have good intentions? Randy agreed that DDES wants to prevent such situations. Randy said that he particularly wanted the RFC to know that the new code gives DDES a lot of flexibility that they did not have in the past. A lot of it, like programmatic codes, have not yet been exercised by DDES. Randy said that the option is out there and it has a lot of potential adaptability to forestry in the long term.

Dennis said that in looking at the proposed template in terms of the larger 20-acre parcels the flexibility comes in because landowners will have the option of doing a state forest practices permit and a stewardship plan on the forested portion. Then, if they have an area they may want to convert they can just fill out a template. Dennis said it sounds like it will be easy. He added that the real hang up will be the smaller parcels in the Forest Production District. If there are too many templates it may cause problems because not everything can be solved with a template. Randy concurred and said that the WSU Extension survey that Amy mentioned earlier in the meeting will be really useful in avoiding this situation, especially if it tells us what management practices are being implemented in King County. DDES will work to design the template around those activities that are most likely to have the greatest impact and will try to exclude what does not fit into a template, according to Randy. In regard to the template format, Boyd recommended keeping the form as simple as possible to make it accessible to landowners.

Dennis said that state DNR and the Forest Practices Board are working on a fifteen-year small landowner forest practice permit, which in essence means that the 13 acres on the 20-acre parcels will be able to get a fifteen-year permit with prescriptions. Landowners will not have to set a timeline, they just have to say what they will do and how they will do it, said Dennis. This is another tool that the state will have. Dennis recommended that when King County is working on these things locally, they should try to dovetail with what is happening at the state level.

Randy commented that the County under the CAO now has the capability of giving a programmatic permit for up to five years and renewing in five year increments. He said that programmatic permits may be a way to address a lot of these cost issues and uncertainty that the RFC has identified.

Alex concluded that in the broader context, DDES's proposed changes are very significant. They are tied in with Julia's work on the Rural Economic Strategy, the infrastructure that Kathy and Amy talked about previously, the County's encouragement of forestry on small private parcels, the County's educational efforts and giving people tax breaks. To make this all work the County needs to make it so that people can get permits in a smooth and cost effective way. The permit process changes discussed today are progress toward these goals. Doug M. added that if King County makes something that works, it will be replicated around the state by other places that are urbanizing, which is very important.

### **Suggestions for future agendas**

1. Amy Grotta with WSU Extension small forest landowner survey
2. Communications with the Executive Office.
3. Update on permitting of recreational trails on government lands.

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The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

**Next meeting**

The next regularly scheduled meeting is July 12, 2006, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in Preston.

Staff Liaison:

Linda Vane, Forestry Program

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